

*\*The following clinic material was presented at the 2005 Percussive Arts Society International Convention, by myself and Alan Shinn, Professor of Percussion at Texas Tech University\**

## **PASIC 2005 TIMPANI FUNDAMENTALS** **by Alan Shinn & Scott Harris**

### **Getting Started - What You Need To Know**

**Positioning the Timpani:** Set the drums (left to right; low to high) so you can reach the proper playing spot simply by pivoting at the waist. Make sure the outside drums (32 and 23) are far enough away from you so you don't strike too close to the middle of the head. The proper beating spot is 1/3 of the way from the rim to the center of the drum.

**Sitting or Standing:** Depends on the person's height, the tuning changes involved and the musical passage (getting around the drums).

**Pitch Ranges:** A B-flat major chord in first inversion will give you the practical bottom note of each drum (D-F-Bb-D). Each drum should get a comfortable perfect fifth above the bottom note. Timpani parts are always written in the bass clef so you must be familiar with note names, where they are on the staff, and how they relate to the drums.

**Grip:** Fulcrum - Hold the mallet between your thumb and first joint of first finger. The fulcrum point should be where the mallet will rebound the most from a given drop.

**German/American Grip:** Similar to matched grip for snare drum.

**French Grip:** The thumbs are on top of the shaft and the palms face each another.

French grip can be more conducive to soft rolls and legato playing while German grip may be more conducive for heavy staccato playing BUT you can achieve these playing styles using both or either of the two grips.

### **Tuning/Ear Training**

Ear training is essential and singing is the best way to develop good ears. Sing with the radio, in a choir or even in the shower. Learn to match pitches by playing a note on a piano, marimba, pitch pipe, or tuning fork and then singing that pitch using the syllable *La*. You can learn to sing intervals (the distance between two notes) by using songs that are familiar to you (i.e.: Here comes the bride = P4). Use your favorite songs and apply them to specific intervals.

#### **Tuning a Pitch on the Timpani:**

1. Lower the drum's pitch to its lowest note (heel position).
2. Find the pitch you want by using a sound source. Make sure the pitch is in your ear (head).
3. Strike (with a mallet) or flick (with your finger) the drum softly and increase the head tension by pushing the pedal down until you reach the desired pitch. It is sometimes good to go above, then below and finally to the pitch to truly find it.
4. Always tune low to high even when tuning down from a previous pitch. This will eliminate any slack in the head tension.
5. Since many times you have to change pitches during a performance, practice tuning with the radio or stereo on.

**Pedaling:** Practice major (and minor) scales on two drums by tuning one drum to the tonic (1<sup>st</sup> scale degree) and the other to the dominant (5<sup>th</sup> scale degree). In tempo, strike and gliss to the next pitch, and the next pitch, etc. Be sure that when you descend that you go down far enough. It's easy to play sharp on the way down. Now practice playing your scale with no glissandi. Using your muscle (kinesthetic) memory move your foot rapidly at the same time you strike the drum. Remember to always produce good sound and tone! Playing simple melodies (*I've Been Workin' on the Railroad*, *Lean On Me*,

